“A legacy / windfall”: “A”-19

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“A”-19 is arguably the most accessible of the late longer movements of *“A”*, not least because of its quickly paced lyrical manner. It marks the conclusion of a set of movements beginning with “A”-13 in which Zukofsky experimented with various predetermined but flexible forms, into which he improvisationally worked randomly gathered materials from his notebooks. Thereafter with *“A”* 21-23 and continuing in *80 Flowers*, he would turn to more programmatically planned works, all of which stick with a five-word line. “A”-18 and -19 appear to have been written more or less simultaneously in the spring of 1966, which was unusual for Zukofsky who tended to work on one project at a time.[1] Working from the same batch of materials in his notebooks, Zukofsky seems to have deliberately sorted out and distributed different materials in composing these two movements. The contrast is striking: the dark, clotted, splenic preoccupation with contemporary events of “A”-18 gives way in “A”-19 to a more lyrical, humorous and speculative mood. “A”-19 focuses primarily on music (Paul) and poetry (Mallarmé)—that is, with the aesthetic response to the hurt so prominent in “A”-18. As we will see, however, although sparse, contemporary news does intrude significantly into “A”-19.

Kenneth Cox accurately and succinctly describes the numerically based structure of “A”-19: “… a prelude of eight quatrains and a chaconne of 72 strophes each of 13 lines except the last which has 12. Occasional irregularities apart there are two words a line in both prelude and piece except that the last line of each strophe has three. […The prelude] is made up of 2^3 quatrains each of 2^3 words and a piece of 2^3 x 3^2 strophes each of 3^3 words. The final strophe, bad luck having been made good and the poem completed, has not 13 but 2^2 x 3 lines and 2^3 x 3 words, but this is not evident till the last word is reached. It may also be noted that the number of strophes (72) mirrors the number of words per strophe (27).”[2] While Zukofsky was always interested in numbers, this is unusually elaborate, and so it is not surprising when Pythagoreans show up later in the movement. Cox assumes that the structure is based on the fifth piece of Bach’s partita for violin solo No. 2 in D minor, although I am not aware of any independent evidence to support this, and he also suggests that the short two-word line is meant to suggest violin bowing (258-259), which one can find plausible or not as one likes. Unquestionably the short line conveys a lyricism as well as practically invites verbal play, a vertical as well as linear reading of associations between words and syllables. The formal contrasts with “A”-18 are notable: the regular short line stanzas versus the irregularly blobby divisions of long lines in “A”-18; “A”-19 moves quickly and despite local obscurities lacks

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[1] From 14 Dec. 1965-26 Feb. 1966 Celia and Louis Zukofsky were in residence at the Yaddo artist retreat with the primary task of finishing *Catullus*, which they did on 1 Feb. Louis then promptly began “A”-19, but not long after returning home he apparently turned to “A”-18, written in March and April, at which point he came back to “A”-19 which he finished by the end of May.

[2] Kenneth Cox, “Tribute to Mallarmé: ‘A’-19,” *Collected Studies in the Use of English* (2001): 256, 260. An earlier version was published as “Zukofsky and Mallarmé: Notes on ‘A’-19,” *MAPS* 5 (1973). Cox’s essay is an excellent introduction to “A”-19, and the interested reader is urged to read it before venturing further with my own commentary.

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the clogged, seemingly higgledy-piggledy manner of the prior movement. There is a notable paucity of punctuation: primarily quotation marks and italics to indicate quotations, or colons and parenthesis to set off materials, but very few periods or commas, giving a sense of long sequences of materials flowing into each other.

Yet at the same time, “A”-19 is partitioned into distinct segments defined by given source materials. Following the prelude, these are:

1) free re-workings of poems by Stéphane Mallarmé (409-411);
2) the Paganini Prize violin competition (412-417);
3) Pythagorean numerology (419-420);
4) Mallarmé’s *Le Livre* notes (421-427);
5) the Hellenistic period skeptic Sextus Empiricus (427-430)

The last four or so pages are more miscellaneous (430-434), but the final two stanzas return to the snow of the prelude as well as mention Mallarmé and the poet’s son. For all his formalism it is unusual for Zukofsky to be so neat, and it is not often that the primary materials so obviously interrelate, at least in the case of music, Mallarmé and the Pythagoreans—we will get to Sextus eventually. One can discern a general trajectory in the poem from the highly performative prelude and reworking of Mallarmé’s poetry that tend toward some conception of pure lyricism to a gradual introduction of more everyday and dissonant elements. However, attempting to discern narrative development in the longer movements of *“A”* is rarely very helpful; rather the tension between aestheticism and the mundane is played out in different keys so that the progression is more a matter of thickening and complicating the basic elements.

Prelude and Playing with Mallarmé

“A”-19 begins with a prelude visually set off from the rest of the poem by its four line stanzas with alternating lines indented, giving it an appropriately light and airy look. The poet is evidently responding to a request for another encore, another movement of the poem, and further details indicate a theater setting with perhaps an impatient stagehand remarking that it is getting late. The tone is resigned, as if the poet is performing more out of a sense of obligation, hinting that he is feeling older but needs to push on with his poem. The resulting lyrical performance, however, is virtuosic with its rich clusters of vowel sounds. The floating and swirling snowflakes, visually limning the music, is mimed both aurally and by the delicate shifts in direction of the words. The general trajectory of the lyric suggests a performance beginning on stage, a specific here, and then expanding outward—in this case literally out the door to a natural scene: snow, pine needles, the moon and the anticipation of tomorrow’s sun—and then back to an acknowledgment of the audience: both violin bōwing and bŏwing to the applause. The concluding mention of “valentine”—appropriately a winter celebration—recalls that the prologue to “A”-18 is also designated a valentine, as were a good many of Zukofsky’s short poems. The valentine is simply a figure for all poems or art, which necessarily seek others who will respond in kind. In the first instance this prelude is an excellent and accessible example of the “difficult” Zukofsky, in which verbal sound, movement and intertwining of images refuse to congeal into a paraphrasable theme. It enacts what all poets want to do, which ultimately is to be with others through or with performing words. The suggestions of performance, violin bowing and the concern with audience all anticipate themes to be picked up later in the movement.

The prelude prepares for the following segment worked from Mallarmé’s poetry, which although a good deal denser is similarly performative. In this segment Zukofsky draws on over a dozen of Mallarmé’s short poems in a highly improvisational manner. He is working directly from the French texts and translating, but not only does he skip around

picking out phrases or single words here and there, he also freely draws on homophonic suggestion or interpolates his own associations. This is the manner of his workings from Aristotle in "A"-13 or Milton in "A"-14, where he is less interested in bringing over the meaning of the original than in composing out of and with the prior text, but in this case there is the added interference of translation and homophonic suggestion. It is a misapprehension to read such passages as critical rewritings of a predecessor with the inevitable implications of Oedipal psycho-dramatics. This is not a new reading of Mallarmé in that sense, which assumes a coherent meaning or interpretation of Mallarmé that is honored or critiqued as the case may be. Rather Zukofsky is literally playing across the surface of the texts as an engagement with rather than a projection of Mallarmé as an allegory of reading. The result is a witty lyrical passage in which the Mallarmé text participates without necessarily being commented on. If the themes and images Zukofsky seems to pick up—luck, bonding, chaos, the azure, the perverse, pride, cursed—strike us as aptly Mallarméan, even when mispronounced, they are hardly distinctive enough to be peculiar to him. This is not to deny the strong sense of affinity Zukofsky detects in Mallarmé, that basis of friendship that draws him to the text in the first place, but to articulate that as an explicit or implicit argument is of little importance compared with the enactment of that affinity which is the proper basis of art as human community. This is Zukofsky's sense of homage to others: you do not rehash what others have said nor imitate their style but generate new work out of and with their texts. This is for Zukofsky an act of friendship and love, as is the case properly of all art, writing or cultural labor. The resultant work belongs neither to Mallarmé nor to Zukofsky, but is a legacy or "loan," as we shall see later, inherited with an obligation to pass it on. The problem of the debasement of this love will crop up later as well, but here Zukofsky is primarily concerned to act it out with Mallarmé. Mallarmé famously claimed his poetry was concerned not with things but with effects, and one might think of Zukofsky as working with the effects rather than the denotative sense of Mallarmé's poetry. Zukofsky's splicing together of bits and pieces from various poems predictably results in a careening text in terms of trying to follow its semantic or imagistic sense, and beyond the pleasures of pure sound, we have imagistic suggestibility, associative relations, glimpsed possibilities, puns. As the final word-image of this segment suggests, the blossom grows beyond reasons (411), which is actually a reasonably close rendition of Mallarmé's original sense.

As we would expect, however, aside from freely picking up and collocating senses that strike Zukofsky, there are clearly detectable various concerns of the larger movement: poetry and music making, specifically that associated with his son Paul and his violin playing. Hence "horsehair" and "mane" arise from Mallarmé's *crinières* (with perhaps a hint of the latter in *che<u>mins</u>*), but also from Paul's violin bow made with horsehair.[3] Of course horse associations are one of the more ubiquitous Zukofsky obsessions throughout *"A"*, with "mane" taking us back to "A"-7 where the horse manes are also the Roman manes or spirits of the dead awoken in all art, which in the present context can be read as the evocation of those sedimented layers lying within the text. In playing over the surface of Mallarmé's poem, Zukofsky picks out signifiers of that primordial tension and dialectic between chaos (*tohu bohu*, from Genesis, is Hebrew for chaos or formlessness, but also adopted into French meaning usually hubbub) and order, between readability and unreadability, that underlie music, poetry or for that matter human endeavor generally. This tension is plainly embodied in Mallarmé's poem with its images of ragged social outcasts (poets) who aspire toward bonding, mending and the azure, articulated in lines that stretch grammar and syntax, yet are scrupulously bound within a symmetrical poetic form. Paul's music or Zukofsky's poetry

[3] For the Mallarmé texts Zukofsky is reworking, see the annotations on the Z-site.

enact and realize themselves through such tension and interplay. The first handful of lines say that there will be no bad luck if there is bonding of the primordial chaos or mending of Mallarmé's "azure." Poetry attempts to overcome formlessness (or *tohu bohu* can simply mean general confusion) by bonding or connecting with others, in other words it mends divisions. Violin playing will figure large in the movement and mending will be picked up later in terms of medicine. In any case, we have a strong indication of Zukofsky's fundamental assumption about what his poetry is necessarily doing: in music, in writing-reading, in doing generally one is always actively being with others.

This immediately raises the question of audience already gestured at in the prelude and a recurring concern in this movement. Mallarmé generally and quite explicitly in the first poem Zukofsky is working from, "Le Guignon," adopts the role of the poet as outcast, the seeker of a purity beyond the capacity of the crowd, which is to say a somewhat exaggerated form of the dominate view of the artist in the West since the Renaissance. "Le Guignon" is usually translated as the jinx or bad luck and implies the sense of being born under a bad sign. Zukofsky begins by immediately negating this bad luck but only if one succeeds in bonding and mending, which is never guaranteed. Although he never had much interest in the pose of the Baudelairean poet (Mallarmé's title explicitly alludes to one of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*), Zukofsky is not critiquing Mallarmé here, and certainly in his own experience he felt neglected and then distrustful when he did begin to gain some attention. Suggestions of this artist as outcast role are threaded through the first three stanzas—the desolate who curse their misfortune out of pride, the martyr and the elect—but notably these give way, mediated by a jubilate bird, to ordinary people (a woman and child, a quarryman, a cobbler) and the everyday—mainly worked from Mallarmé's "Chansons bas" (Street Songs). This Mallarmé segment concludes with what appears to be a version of Zukofsky's *Bottom* thesis: a rejection of the mind's hallucinations that would oppose the eye's situatedness in the world, and the suggestion that "the litigious" are countered by the image of a bloom growing beyond reasons (411). One can tease out any number of possible arguments such as this, but it is questionable that they have more than a subjective plausibility, except to the extent they relate to details and topics found elsewhere in the movement or in *"A"*. What stands out but can be forgotten in the strain to interpret is the very manner in which this sort of segment blooms beyond reasons. Zukofsky can be oblique enough even when he is evidently making an argument, but in passages such as these there is clearly a primary concern to make song, which may be suggestive in any number of ways but is not concerned with relaying a specific paraphrasable thesis. There is an interest in engaging viscerally with the intricacy of the verbal construction. Later the poem will engage with Mallarmé in a more dialogic manner.

Paganini

The poem now modulates into a segment directly concerned with music, but in a very different and more factual mode, relating to the Paganini Prize violin competition in which Paul competed in 1963. The materials concerning the Paganini competition are introduced and indeed primarily taken up with five pages quoted from the application instructions and regulations (412-416). The replication of the wobbly English translation extracts some humor from what is an exercise in making a poem out of anything that comes to hand. But this document and particularly its legalistic language have an ominous touch too as representing the business of music—competition and careerism—that threatens the art itself. The document can be taken as symptomatic of the regulated and bureaucratized society in which we all find ourselves enmeshed and which give arise to questions about the function and possibility of art. The additional details concerning the actual competition itself are comparatively brief and oblique but are equally edged with bite—Zukofsky is not much

interested in the event itself. The fact that the eventual winner of the competition was a "Russian" (actually from the Ukraine) prompts Zukofsky to insert a quotation from Shakespeare about confronting Russians or more precisely characters disguised as Russians. This introduces a Cold War motif at a time when any competition became a field for proving the superiority of one ideological system over another, whether in space, sports or arts. However within the context of the competition the Russian winner and American son transcend this political tension because of the art, as epitomized by the honorable gesture of the winner telling Paul that if it were not a competition symptomatic of larger geo-political struggles, he should have won (417).[4] To this is added a gesture by the Italian chairman of the competition who allows Paul to play Paganini's violin, a privilege strictly speaking reserved for the winner. Whether this is also meant to imply that Paul should have won, it is in any case an act where the mutual love and labor of music transcends regulations and judging. A reference to what seems to be rain leaking on a painting of Paganini up in the concert hall leads into a quotation by Whitman critical of the wildly popular singer Jenny Lind for showy over-elaboration, which leads into miscellaneous mentions of music festivals such as Tanglewood and a thousand children playing a rondeau on television (417-418). All this appears to imply the tendency toward performance as spectacle and a pandering to mass consumption. In terms of virtuoso performance, Paganini was the prototype of the celebrity violinist, whose pyrotechnics tended to obscure appreciation of the music. This is not a criticism of Paganini but a statement of the dilemma, the competing demands on the musician (or poet) in the modern world.[5]

Abruptly the poem switches with a remark that the outcome of all contests are decided beforehand, which might be taken as a sour comment on the results of the Paganini competition, but also indicates there is a larger and more significant context from which to understand this music business. The pivot here is the number four—Paul came in fourth and there is mention of four fours in the Russian Shakespeare quotation, but we are now introduced to the Pythagorean four meaning justice, a more cosmically framed sense of balance, the assurance that there is a higher or more meaningful justice than the epiphenomena of music contests and similar distractions. The poet is concerned about his son as he becomes caught up in the music business, a topic that will be dealt with in some detail in *Little*, to which Zukofsky would return and complete in the near future.[6] Immediately prior

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[4] Paul Zukofsky points out that his father was habitually "free" with facts even in his everyday life, much less in his writing. The Russian recipient of the Paganini Prize made no such generous gesture and the remarks attributed to him were made by another, possibly Russian, competitor.

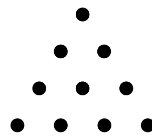
[5] Paul Zukofsky made a recording of Paganini's *Caprices* released in 1970 (Vanguard) and his liner notes indicate a concern with the music's integrity, rather than simply as a vehicle for virtuosic performance. The notes are reproduced on the Musical Observations site at <http://www.musicalobservations.com/recordings/cp2_120_121.html>.

[6] *Little* was begun in 1950 when Zukofsky wrote the first eight chapters and then dropped the project until he finished "A"-21 in 1967. Since the novel is obviously autobiographically based, the earlier chapters only deal with Little as a small child—Paul would have been six or seven at the time—but already a precocious musician, so that Zukofsky would have known that there would be more to write in the future. When he picked up the novel again many years later, he had much more experience of the music business and this becomes the dominate concern of the bulk of the narrative. With regard to the poetry business, it is worth mentioning that after a couple decades of struggling just for the occasional publication, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s Zukofsky received many invitations to read around the

to the start of the Paganini Prize passage, we have an anecdote in which the poet (or possibly someone else) asks his four-year-old son why he wants to take up the violin to which the son responds because he loves it and adds, in so many words, that the question is stupid (412). The question of taking up music or poetry is not practical or even in that sense answerable—one does it because one must, which is to say out of love. Zukofsky is not simplistically counterpoising love against business, but is posing the question of whether or how love survives the business. The prelude, we recall, introduces the poet as himself something of a performing act, about which he expresses some reluctance yet proceeds to do his bit.

Greeks

Zukofsky introduces into "A"-19 two groups of materials from ancient Greek philosophy, the Pythagoreans (419-420) and the skeptic Sextus Empiricus (428-430), which are placed on either side of the central segment dealing with Mallarmé's *Le Livre* project. The presence of the Pythagoreans is hardly surprising given their number philosophy, discovery of the relationship between mathematics and music, and theory of the music of the spheres. Zukofsky gives key aspects of the Pythagoreans' number symbolism, beginning with four (two squared) standing for justice, which as mentioned relates to the preceding violin competition and the question of judging, but formally too to the opening lyrical passage of the movement which uses a four line, two-word per line stanza. Four then becomes ten, the sacred tetraktys, taken to represent the entire cosmic order. The logic here is visually represented by a triangle with four to a side, plus one in the middle adding up to ten:



Beginning from any point of the triangle, one can count the rows from one to four and out of this can be generated all other numbers and thus the universe (Pythagorean mathematics has no zero). To this are added the ideas of a central fire and a universal breath (rhythm), both of which can be imagined as visually suggested by the tetraktys. This vision of numerical coherence is of course also that of music and poetry, and to a degree underwrites the forms of this particular movement. The Pythagorean philosophy is affirmative and ambitious, an assertion of cosmic order and oneness that is written out in numbers and music, and so the final Pythagorean quotation, the so-called "Golden Words," is a prayer to this belief (419-420).

Zukofsky then radically translates this prayer into imagistic terms: the blessing of wistaria, a more concrete sense of well-being (420). But it is as if this very act of bringing the sense of cosmic order into the immediate raises doubts, so that Zukofsky then questions whether his poetry is anything more than an arrangement of random numbers. This leads into a quotation from Demetrius' *On Style* on the power of elevated language. Demetrius was a rhetorician rather than a Pythagorean, but Zukofsky's quotation begins with an emphasis on the harmonizing powers of the seven vowels of Egyptian hymns, thus making the numerical connection.[7] The crucial role of vowel sounds and diphthongs in the musical quality of poetry is obvious to any poet, and this entire quotation foregrounds the aural dimension of language so central to Zukofsky's own work. Demetrius is specifically speaking of hymns to the gods,

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country, usually instigated by younger poets. This late attention gave rise to ambiguous feelings.

[7] Zukofsky's source is the Loeb Classical Library edition of *Aristotle: Poetics, Longinus: On the Sublime and Demetrius: On Style*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (1902).

and Zukofsky parenthetically interpolates the phrase, “before phoneme,” to emphasize upper limit music where the sound emphasis is on blending or bonding rather than distinctly articulated (conventionally recognizable) sound units, while at the same time asserting the variety of the resultant effects. This hymning attempts to embody that sense of cosmic totality and variety, with a particular insistence on the sensuality of the language.

But this attempt to justify poetry by tying it to a Pythagorean logic segues without any syntactical break into an association with Bach’s cantata, “Die Elenden sollen essen,” which means the wretched shall (or should) eat. This title cuts several ways. While it is a hymn to God, its title brings matters down to earth from the abstract numerology of the Pythagoreans. Titles or text for Zukofsky are never merely matters of what they say but what they do, so this title indicates what all poetry/music or cultural labor generally necessarily does: it is food for our wretchedness. While one version of this desired food is Christian belief, there is no guarantee out there that it all makes sense, simply that there is a desire that must be acted on. While presumably Bach’s cantata does fulfill Demetrius’ description of divinely elevated song and the latter is also apt in its professionally technical detail, we should not be surprised that Mallarmé and his “*hasard*” are just around the corner.

Some pages later, on the other side of the workings with Mallarmé’s *Le Livre* notes, appears Sextus Empiricus, the 2nd century no-nonsense skeptic. Zukofsky once described his own anti-philosophical position as that of a “valid skepticism” (*Prep+* 167), a skepticism that would doubt even skepticism, by which he meant to identify himself with the classical tradition of Skepticism. Sextus does not so much deny the possibility of knowledge per se as advocate a suspension of judgment, insisting that for any argument there are equally valid contrary or alternative arguments. This deflection of the question from epistemology to the figural nature of language refuses any dogmatic assertion of meaning or truth and instead allows the differences and variations to flourish. This is the thrust of Zukofsky’s initial quotations from Sextus to the effect that language is an aid to memory and shared experience rather than a transformative instrument: you cannot learn from argument what you have not already learned from experience. Therefore the professor has no subject nor method to teach, nor for that matter does the professor (as someone who can teach) exist any more than does his student (as someone who can be taught).[8] This also chimes with the sense of futility that both Mallarmé and Zukofsky experienced as professors.

Zukofsky follows this up with three stanzas of improvised reflections on his own understanding of skepticism (428-429).[9] The *Bottom*-like “eye” sees that most “ills” are from “stubborn / intelligence,” that is dogmatism or an insistence on fixed (abstracted) meaning. One can only expect a few true “friends” (readers), which does not mean that they simply echo the author’s meaning (in the skeptical position non-existent in any case) but read “intimately”—engage and participate with the writing. I have already suggested that the prelude and early reworkings of Mallarmé call for reading along these lines—a participatory engagement with rather than a paraphrasable anchoring down of the authorial intention. Continuing with Zukofsky’s meditation, then, the intellect needs to resign itself to less meaning in the conventional sense in order to see the range of meanings on both sides of a

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[8] All the quotations from Sextus Empiricus in “A”-19 are from *Against the Professors*, a title Zukofsky undoubtedly found irresistible, in the Loeb Classical Library edition translated by R.G. Bury (1949).

[9] There is a fuller draft version of this passage in Zukofsky’s working notebooks (HRC 4.6, dated 23 Sept. 1965), which is unusual in that he did not often write out personal reflections; the notebooks are predominately collections of materials for possible use with very little commentary or personal rumination.

flipped coin (the *hasard* motif), or even better see the edge of the coin as proliferating into possibilities that chance offers. "Increscent" is the word Zukofsky uses—an aurally suggestive image of curved growth associated with the moon and time. He concludes by confirming that this suffering or limiting of the intellect is compensated for by the body's commitment (there is a telling pun on "plight," meaning both in difficulties and to pledge/betroth, both division and binding) to "at least / two" (429), which might be heard as echoing Mallarmé-Zukofsky's blooming beyond reasons.

At this point Zukofsky returns to Sextus and an anecdote about Pythagoras to remind us that all this needs to be read against the earlier segment on Pythagoreanism. Zukofsky gives the anecdote, which is actually an opportunity for Sextus to show how wrong-headed Pythagoras is, in elliptical form: Pythagoras asserts that some drunken youths should be sobered up by playing a "spondean" mode of music, whereas Sextus indicates (as Zukofsky parenthetically paraphrases it) Pythagoras should simply have left if they were bothering him. Zukofsky is evidently amused at the claim that music or poetry could have such a pacifying effect on rambunctious youngsters, and his specific paraphrase makes a reasonably clear allusion to the contemporary 60s youth culture. In any case the implication is that Pythagoras assumes his mathematical-musical philosophy can cure all ills, which in this case takes on a strongly moralistic cast. The critical function of humor to counter excessive earnestness, as demonstrated by this anecdote, is also typically Zukofskian. One can imagine Zukofsky smiling at his own moments of impatience with the young, and what the anecdote about Pythagoras boils down to here is skeptical tolerance—living with rather than trying to correct others. The specific lead into this anecdote, "Sextus need / not offend Pythagoras…," is characteristically ambiguous and stilted, and the syntactical effect is to avoid coming down too firmly with Sextus' rebuke of Pythagoras, but then that ambiguity is perfectly in line with the skeptical meditation with Sextus just sketched out. In any case, it draws Sextus and Pythagoras together so that the former's skepticism qualifies the flamboyant number metaphysics of the latter and for that matter all the more grandiose propensities of philosophy, music and poetry.

However, despite my suggestion that Zukofsky aligns himself with skepticism, this is not to say Sextus serves as the voice of the poet. In Zukofsky's skepticism no voice entirely speaks for another, and this needs to be kept in mind in considering the innumerable quotations incorporated into his works. Pythagoras and Sextus are brought into dialogue to sketch a range (two sides of a coin) rather than to promote one at the expense of the other. The Pythagorean tendency is toward an affirmative assertion of cosmic order and how humans fit into it, and this is a primordial impetus of poetry as implied by the hymns to the gods as described by Demetrius. But rhetorically such affirmative assertions tend to become fixed and dogmatic, and in the case of the Pythagoreans became a cult of esoteric knowledge. It is precisely the claim by the Pythagoreans or of any other philosophers to possess specific ideas that Sextus critiqued and mocked. As Zukofsky mentions twice, Sextus was a practicing physician who wanted to rid medicine of metaphysics. He does not in fact advocate a philosophy but rather a therapeutic purgation of philosophical conundrums with the ultimate aim of achieving a sense of tranquility. Not only might this remind us of Wittgenstein's later characterization of his own philosophical activity, but one can find already in Sextus the famous image of the kicked away ladder that concludes the *Tractatus*.[10] But the interest in the

[10] *Against Logicians*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. R.G. Bury (1933): "[…] just as it is not impossible for a man who has ascended to a high place by a ladder to overturn the ladder with his foot after his ascent, so also it is not unlikely that the Sceptic after he has arrived at the demonstration of this thesis by means of the argument proving the non-existence of proof, as it were by a step-ladder, should then abolish this very argument" (VIII.481). Some scholars

Pythagoreans is not as a philosophy in that sense but as a discourse, a way to articulate our being in the world and as such it is a positive mode as opposed to Sextus' curative negation. They implicate and balance each other.

Mallarmé's *Le Livre*

Between the Pythagoreans and Sextus Empiricus appears the workings from Mallarmé's *Le Livre*, which here is not the famous essay in which the poet declared that everything exists to end up in a book, but his fragmentary notes toward the actualization of that proposition, which were edited by Jacques Scherer and published in 1957. The notes propose an impossibly elaborate *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a Book subdivided into further books with predetermined numbers of pages and words, unbound so that they could be read in any number of permutations and directions; there were to be séance-like performances incorporating drama, singing and dialogue; plus there are reflections on the role of the audience, an extensive publishing scheme and financing details. *Le Livre* is meticulously planned yet incorporates chance. It is a conceptual work whose realization is difficult to imagine, even though Mallarmé takes into consideration details of its social and practical ramifications.

The major presence of Mallarmé in "A"-19 is intriguing. He was not a poet who loomed large in Zukofsky's mental universe, yet here he is the only poet other than William Carlos Williams to receive an explicit homage in *"A"*. Although French was the foreign language Zukofsky knew best, one does not have the impression he particularly focused on French poetry beyond his natural inclination to read across all the canonical works of Western literature. There was of course the Apollinaire project in the early 1930s, which was a matter of happenstance, as was the occasion of translating a few poems of Alain Bosquet in the early 1940s.[11] One can make a substantial list of concerns ordinarily associated with Mallarmé that are entirely antithetical to Zukofsky: poetry as a type of spiritual compensation for the crisis of faith with ritualistic characteristics, the purification of language, hermeticism, exotic detail and the cultivation of rarified sensations with its accompanying condescension toward the crowd and its newspapers. The entire framing and orientation of Mallarmé's work in and as crisis in response to the loss of traditional belief is alien to Zukofsky, and images of shipwreck or their equivalents so liberally scattered across modernist literature, art and thought are rare in his work. While it is true that the formal extremes and eccentricity of Zukofsky's work can be read as symptomatic of modernity in crisis, he never frames, motivates or justifies his work on such grounds, which I would suggest is one of the reasons why readers often have difficulties figuring out how to get a handle on his poetry.

However, one cannot presume that Zukofsky's interest in another writer is primarily based on content, themes, style, similar poetics or influence, and he does not often use other writers to authorize or ventriloquize his own particular views or thoughts. As he notes, *Le Livre de Mallarmé* came into his hands from Paul (421), an entirely fortuitous event that offers one reason why the movement is dominated by Paul and Mallarmé. Zukofsky also

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have traced Wittgenstein's image to this passage. There is no evidence to suggest that Zukofsky read this volume.

[11] Zukofsky seems to have met Bosquet, who was in exile in New York during the early 1940s, perhaps in connection with the aborted *La France en Liberté* project he and René Taupin planned to edit (see Mark Scroggins, *A Poem of a Life* (2007): 201-202). Zukofsky translated at least four of his poems, two of which were published (one of these can be found reprinted in *WCW/LZ* 311, while two unpublished renditions are included among the "Discarded Poems" in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (1979): 161-162).

mentions a few coincidental points of identity between himself and Mallarmé, such as that both made their livings as professors of English and disliked the drudge. A few years later, Zukofsky would give a lecture on Wallace Stevens, simply because he was invited to give the Wallace Stevens Memorial Lecture at the University of Connecticut.[12] As far as I know this did not require him to talk about Stevens, yet it is entirely typical that Zukofsky would understand his task in this manner. In preparation, he immersed himself in the available works of Stevens, who he had always considered an important poet but not particularly so in the development of his own poetics and practice. A large portion of the lecture is taken up with chronicling their parallel lives with attention to biographical connections between himself and Stevens, which are quite ephemeral since they never met and barely corresponded. Predictably the heart of the lecture (easily overlooked in the reading text) is the reading of a set of six Stevens poems counterpointed by six selections from his own works in "antiphonal" fashion (*Prep+* 37). Occasionally the relation between the paired poems turns on the contingency of an echoed name or word, but often the connection appears to be more subjectively conceptual or tonal. There is no question of influence here, nor has Zukofsky late in life discovered some deep affinity between their works except as any engaged reader necessarily finds and feels identities with the text, even when averring from it. It is not a matter of some paraphrasable essence that typifies this poet that is then translated in the work of another, but rather one comes to texts from any manner of different angles, contexts or attentions which in turn produce unpredictable effects. The points of contact or identify are not merely subjective, whatever that means, but are based on the fact that they necessarily inhabit the same world—more specifically a poetic world where poems are rewritten, reread, reformulated or remanifested over and over in any number of ways. The slightness and haphazardness of the personal contacts Zukofsky mentions between himself and Stevens are nonetheless subjectively significant, as we all know from our own experience, even though critical discourse normally filters out such ephemeral connections as inconsequential. Zukofsky's homage to Stevens is not motivated by the latter's importance to or perceived identity with him but is a performance called forth by the act of reading.[13]

There is a considerable difference between the two Mallarmé segments of "A"-19 in how Zukofsky handles his source materials, which in part reflects the difference in the nature of the original materials. As we have seen, in using Mallarmé's poems he writes with them, so that we cannot say he is exactly quoting, alluding to or imitating the originals in any usual sense, and ultimately the emphasis in this segment is on the lyrical. Mallarmé's presence is everywhere in evidence, yet it is of little use to refer to Mallarmé's texts as a key to reveal what Zukofsky is doing. The *Le Livre* segment, in contrast, is staged as a reading, explicitly presenting quotations from Mallarmé with linking elements that presumably comment on the quotations in one way or another. The segment is unique in *"A"* as there is no other instance

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[12] For discussions of Zukofsky and Stevens, all focusing on this lecture, see Alan Golding, "The 'Community of Elements' in Wallace Stevens and Louis Zukofsky" in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*, ed. Albert Gelpi (1985): 121-140; Mark Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (1998): 259-271; P. Michael Campbell, "The Comedian as the Letter Z: Reading Zukofsky Reading Stevens Reading Zukofsky" in *Upper Limit Music: The Writings of Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Mark Scroggins (1997): 175-191.

[13] A related instance, although quite different in its performance, is Zukofsky's piece "*Golgonoozà?*" (*Prep+* 41-44), which originated in a request by Henry Rago, editor of *Poetry*, for a review of four critical books on William Blake (*SL* 304). The books ostensibly under review are only glancingly alluded to, and Zukofsky's interest was in creating a critical dialogue with Blake, primarily constructed out of quotations of Blake's own words.

of a sustained presentation (in this case over six pages) of quotations from a single source counterpointed in a manner suggesting a dialogic, even argumentative exchange. Zukofsky does not attempt to give the gist of Mallarmé's *Le Livre* project, but selects a number of points that strike him for whatever reason, and his translations are elliptical (indicated by the heavy presence of ellipses) of what are already highly elliptical notes.[14] While we must be cautious in reducing Zukofsky to an argument when he expends so much energy in evasive maneuvers to avoid paraphrasability, there are nonetheless clear points where he is demurring from or agreeing with Mallarmé. So on the one hand Zukofsky is again freely composing with the Mallarmé materials as determined by his own interests and concerns, but on the other in a manner that is more speculative and discursive.

On consecutive pages appear the words "forecast," "forecasting," "foregone" and "foreseeing," which I will take as a string to enter into and follow through this segment of "A"-19. These words suggest the relationship between the past and the present or between the present and the future, in other words the topics of time, legacy, tradition and influence. As mentioned, Zukofsky tends to askew a model of something essential being carried over for that of contingency and overdetermination. If the appearance of Mallarmé in *"A"* is on the one hand coincidence, it is with its very presentation pre-determined, takes on the character of being inevitable (foregone), to be understood as an integral and necessary part of the poem. Of course Mallarmé himself is the poet of *le hasard* and the overcoming of chance in the act of poetry which at the same time can never abolish Chance. Also, particularly for a thoroughly modernist poet like Zukofsky, Mallarmé is an inevitable forefather, whether or not he ever read him, but when he does read him he naturally discovers all manner of points of affinity and counterpoint.

The first "forecast" actually appears just prior to the *Le Livre* segment proper, when Zukofsky mentions someone who forecast that he would go hungry—presumably if he chooses to pursue a poetic career. This might have been his hard-working father, although it could be Pound or even Mallarmé, but in any case, the actual point is simply a clichéd, if real enough image of committed artists/poets in modernity, who are more likely to be worth something after they are dead. Mallarmé himself, as any short biographical sketch mentions, lived in financially straightened circumstances (although certainly not starving) harnessed to a job (identical to Zukofsky's) that he disliked and which drained considerable time and energy from his true vocation, about which he made no compromises. We should note that this forecasting of the poet going hungry follows shortly after the mention of Bach's "Die Elenden sollen essen," so as not to miss the double meaning of "hunger" here and the perpetual problem of the artist in modernity split between material needs (the business of art) and aesthetic-spiritual aspirations.[15] However, in raising the starving artist image, Zukofsky rejects it or at least he wants to since he never chose to present himself in the role of poet as outsider and martyr to art, so central to the self-image of Mallarmé and the poets with whom he identified (e.g. Baudelaire, Poe) as well as numerous contemporary counterparts at the time Zukofsky was writing. Therefore we should also recognize that the allusion to Mallarmé's famous remark about purifying the speech of the tribe—which happens to appear in the sonnet to Poe— is not one that Zukofsky simply accepts. The view that ordinary language needs purifying was alien to Zukofsky. He renders Mallarmé's "*tribu*" as "scrawling race," which in the first instance wryly refers to the pupils whom both Mallarmé and

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[14] Actually Zukofsky's quotations are not restricted to the *Le Livre* notes since several are from other Mallarmé essays that he found quoted in Scherer's long introduction.

[15] These competing senses of "hunger" appear as far back as "Poem beginning 'The'" (*CSP* 17); see Z-Notes commentary.

Zukofsky attempt to teach in their day jobs, but also implicates poets and particularly mongrel American poets such as himself. In any case this split between the everyday and the pure, between earth and the azure so fundamental in Mallarmé conceptualization of his art and the role as an artist and which stands for an entire tendency within the question of the artist and modernity, held no attraction to Zukofsky, even if his works may appear quite disconnected from the ordinary. It is at this point that the poet's son appears with the gift of *Le Livre*, a gesture Zukofsky characterizes as "poetic justice," recalling the prior concerns with the sense of justice in relation to musical competition, which here is "poetic" because it is timely and will be turned into poetry.

By the next "forecasting" on the following page, Zukofsky has introduced Mallarmé's "hazard" and related terms—"chances staked" and "dice." This may recall his previous mention of arranging "random / numbers," but in any case he appears to identify himself with the same poetic current and risk as that of Mallarmé. The context suggests that this is less concerned with the gamble or risk of the individual poem than the relation between work of Mallarmé and his century with that of Zukofsky and his. That is, while Mallarmé forecasts the poetry of Zukofsky, at the same time its consequences were and remain unpredictable. The emphasis on the word "fore-cast" maintains the element of the dice roll and chance. The perception here is not particularly remarkable in itself, but the implication is that Mallarmé and Zukofsky maintain this double-focus on the present and the future: present composition that necessarily seeks readers always looks forward to an unknown and uncertain future (readings), and does so by acting out the future (reading-writing) of one's inheritance. Poets always draw out the future of the poetry that has come to them and cast their own work and the past along with it into the hazards of the future. It is hardly surprising that Zukofsky, who so self-consciously worked with found materials, is constantly reflecting on the consequences of that inheritance. There is a curious allusion to Pegasus born from the blood of Medusa that evidently refers to the current century born from the previous or any poetry born of its tradition—here imagined in an unusually violent image. While Zukofsky was a keen reader of the classics, mythological allusions are rare, although there is the obvious appeal of the spirit of poetry in the form of a winged horse. However, the incongruity of this birth, Pegasus from Medusa, may be the point here, where Zukofsky is concerned with the contingency and unpredictability of influence.

On the following page we encounter "foregone sublimations" of Poe's *Eureka*, which presumably refers to Mallarmé, and certainly Poe's presence in French literature, predominately through the enthusiasm and translations of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, is one of the outstanding examples of the unpredictability of literary influence—the specific mention of *Eureka* tweaking the oddity that bit more. There are some typical punning complications here since "eureka" as an interjection implies a spontaneous and unique discovery, which here is tied back into its hidden or repressed genealogy. As Zukofsky words this, these "foregone sublimations" (which encrypts the phrase "foregone conclusions") directly lead into and characterize a quote on fragments that fracture while simultaneously fitting into or suiting the rhythm of the whole (423-424). While in the first instance one would take this to refer to Mallarmé's *Le Livre* project since, after all, it is quoting these notes, it is equally or even more applicable to poetic inheritance: each poet or poem is a fragment fitting itself into the ensemble of the whole by fracturing its inheritance to reveal new possibilities or rhythms within that whole. Again, Mallarmé individually as well as the entire orientation toward his craft that he exemplifies is prototypical of this general perspective and practice—what vaguely goes under the term avant-garde.

It is worth taking a look at the original source for this passage to see how Zukofsky works (underlined words and phrases indicate those Zukofsky "translates"):

[171 (A)] *Pièce*
| *ou*
cette représentation avec concert
dialogue poème et symphonie
pour scène et orch
—occupe le fond de l'Œ —

vers

et come publiIée en livre
journal et vers
s'adapte – à un journal régulier
une fois pour toutes, et,
toutes les questions traitées,
par quelqu'un qui les réduit à son
chapeau façon de tout rendre
vierge – ce qui est exté-
rieur au poéme

___ *et comme publication*

c'est, par fragments de

[172 (A)]
la représentation — chacun en donnant
le rythme d'ensemble — selon sa fraction

Laquelle est — soit 1/8ᵉ ?[16]

This is one continuous note, with the bracketed references indicating the leaf numbers in Scherer's edition, but we can see that Zukofsky takes advantage of the arbitrary page break to slip in the "foregone sublimations" of Poe into his rendition from Mallarmé—a characteristic practice. The appearance of Poe is quite possibly suggested visually by "l'OE." The beginning of this note lists genres to be included in the performance of *Le Livre*, but then Zukofsky in typical witty fashion finds or creates within the ensemble an allusion to his *Bottom* thesis: "['…] . . bottom / de l'OE—' / towards (?) '(*vers*) […]'" (423). "l'OE," so Mallarmé's editor informs us, abbreviates "Oeuvre" (work) but also obviously suggests "oeil" (eye). Zukofsky literally translates "vers" as "toward" but then gives the French since it suggests "verse" (Cox 267) or perhaps even "versus." The eye situates and grounds the work in the world as it moves towards verse. More to the point and why Mallarmé is of such significance, because we are grounded we aspire toward the azure, the eye wanders upward. However, Zukofsky's insistence—mania one might think in *Bottom*—is that the inexorable desire for the azure must not repress and forget from whence it sprang (the "bottom"). Such repression results in the azure being defined as forever beyond human possibility—it becomes the old desire and folly for immortality in its various manifestations. Zukofsky makes the passage literally turn visually on the word *vers*, both verse and toward, so that this

[16] Jacques Scherer, *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé: Premières recherches sur des documents inédits* (Librairie Gallimard 1957).

multi-genre work as poetry moves toward its readers—published for all—what under one's own hat is virginal or pure. Zukofsky rendition here is colloquial but not implausible: Mallarmé's "*réduit à son chapeau*" (reduced to his hat) presumably refers to the unique individual who can either be the poet or his reader-audience, in any case to unique individual experience and thus Zukofsky's "under / one's HAT." To keep something under one's hat is also to keep it to oneself—pure thought and thus "virginal."

This quotation from Mallarmé leads immediately without a break into our last word in the string, "foreseeing," whose object is a quotation from "A"-4 mentioning hats and therefore linking to Mallarmé's hat. If we sketch out the logic of this passage, Mallarmé's hat leads via Poe's metaphysical speculations to a characterization of the work or the ensemble of works as a quasi-cosmic process of harmony and dissonance leading to Zukofsky's hats of forty years previous. Quite odd! Although we have been talking about the contingency of influence, it seems perfectly implausible to suggest that a randomly picked up detail in Mallarmé foresees Zukofsky's own mention of hats in "A"-4, composed in 1928. If we recover the specific context of Zukofsky's earlier text, matters become even more puzzling. There the line about hats refers to the fathers of the traditional Jewish faith against whom, in the context of "A"-4, Yehoash and the poet himself are opposed. The fathers say that wherever they put their hats is their home due to their condition of permanent exile, which Zukofsky indicates in that movement is more than simply a matter of the historical diaspora of the Jews but inherent in a faith where God by definition is always at an infinite distance and thus the believer is necessarily always in a state of exile. The poet as exile is common, even endemic in the whole tradition of the modern artist, and in this particular sense is obviously relevant to Mallarmé for whom the azure was always a necessary but impossible ideal—the guarantee of "crisis." However, this is not a conception of the poet that appealed to Zukofsky, and he is reasonably explicit in rejecting the poetic of the impossible ideal, thus the force of the reference to *Bottom*. It is probably not irrelevant that "A"-4 is a movement confronting the claims of inheritance, specifically of Zukofsky's Jewish heritage, whose inexorable presence in his makeup he acknowledges while firmly denying it is determinative or central to the work he wishes to pursue (see Z-Notes commentary on "A"-4).

The suggestion that Mallarmé's textual hat forecasts that of Zukofsky is on the face of it farfetched, although we can try to make sense of this by working with various allegorical possibilities of what hat might mean. Even so it is not easy to bring together the plausible meanings of Mallarmé's hat with that of Zukofsky's hats in "A"-4, and I do not think this is in fact quite the point. Zukofsky reads Mallarmé's "hat" and recalls his own "hat," a random verbal association, but this is how Zukofsky feels texts come together and influence each other. Textual influence as commonly understood is a massive process of weeding out contingencies to formulate firm relations that no one really believes except that they adhere to a certain institutional discourse. When any given reader reads any given text at any given moment anything can be related to anything else, and we all know that what is designated the random, eccentric, implausible, in other words the "subjective," plays a significant role in our reading (or writing) process. This is to say Zukofsky is reinserting *le hasard* into that process. In "A"-19 Zukofsky is less interested in Mallarmé as a calculable influence on his own work or on modern poetry generally than as an active presence (influence) in the reading-writing of the poem itself. This is simply how we read and write with others. We can extrapolate from that Mallarmé's supposed importance, directly or indirectly, to making Zukofsky's work possible, but this is not what Zukofsky is saying or concerned about.

Shortly after these hats appears a quotation from Pascal stating that no one is offended for failing to see everything. The appearance of Pascal in the neighborhood of Mallarmé is hardly surprising and the relationship between Pascal's wager and Mallarmé's throw of the

dice has often enough been noted.[17] Zukofsky puns on Pascal's name by evoking paschal candles, lit at Easter time as a symbol of faith (in case we miss it, the pun is repeated on the next page), which might be related to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with which *"A"* begins, as well as to the faith of the fathers in "A"-4 whose belief in a distant but always watching God assures that anywhere can be home. In any case Pascal's bet (*hasard*) on faith without guarantee allows for the self-mollifying assertion that one cannot be expected to know everything, yet (so it is implied) things make sense.

These rather abstract quotations from both Mallarmé and Pascal are then abruptly given an illustration in the form of the first space walk made by the cosmonaut Alexey Leonov in 1965. This is the first appearance of a contemporary news event in "A"-19, which normally pepper the other 1960s movements. In this case, in the neighborhood of Mallarmé and Pascal, the emptiness of space is an image of the abyss, but it is entirely characteristic of Zukofsky that he expresses this not as nothingness but specifically as the absence of others. This image of the abyss is literally a matter of rising above, of transcendence and so there is an implied critique because that is never actually where we are. Even the utter aloneness of a spacewalk can only be expressed relative to what it is not, that is, what has been left behind. The relevance of this to Mallarmé and to poetry and music generally is not difficult to see, as he is an outstanding example of the urge toward aesthetic transcendence, the realization of a strict distinction between the azure and the earthly, yet who never deluded himself that that transcendence was possible more than momentarily, that is, within time and the earthly against which the azure becomes conceivable or is invented (is launched). Zukofsky would probably be inclined to see something of a false philosophical problem here in that the very terms define and implicate each other, so that we are simply talking about the effects of figuration itself, but then the conscious recognition of this situation or structure of figuration can itself evoke analogous existential quandaries. If Zukofsky consistently insists on keeping our feet grounded, he recognizes the inescapability of the urge toward transcendence, at least in the sense of the capacity to recognize others, of some things and some other beyond our immediate sensations. A couple pages previous, immediately following the allusion to Medusa and Pegasus, Zukofsky mentions a version of Mallarmé's proposition that everything is meant to end up in a book as the desire to make the universe "purely" of language, to which he immediately demurs by saying he prefers to keep his horse on the ground. Zukofsky contrasts Mallarmé's abstract conception or ideal with a set of imagistic words: horse, pavement, green, city, country. Green, the most emphasized color in Zukofsky's work implicating earthly growth, contrasts not only with Mallarmé's azure but also with the black and white of pure written text mentioned immediately after.[18]

If in one sense the image of the floating Leonov is more concrete or specific compared with the preceding abstract statements of Mallarmé and Pascal, Zukofsky then immediately quotes Mallarmé concerning a loan from on high of some sort that is "'restored to / the people'" (424). So not only are space adventures brought down to earth but the image of absolute aloneness comes back to everyone, in what appears to be something of a socialist gesture. Zukofsky wryly comments parenthetically on Mallarmé's statement, however, by asking when had "all" (the people) ever had all? The odd use of "loan" indicates a political economic inflection—the common wealth that rightfully belongs to all in the hands of the relatively few is analogous to (and made possible by) abstractions that are necessarily born of specific sensations to which they properly return, that is, to existence in the world that

[17] The connection is briefly considered by Scherer in his introduction to *Le Livre de Mallarmé* (152-154).

[18] On green, see *Bottom*, particularly 134-136 and 200-201. This is also a color Zukofsky associated with William Carlos Williams, in whose work "green" is ubiquitous.

necessarily means with others. All of this presumably applies to poetry-music as well—the urge toward transcendence but ultimately grounded in the body and the world. This loan is the cultural inheritance, what we receive in trust from the past with an obligation to return it, to pass it on to the future as it is the property of all.

In our earthly trajectory we now find ourselves in a grape arbor with columns, both structure and cultivation with a touch of classical inheritance, an appropriate enough image of the poem in the world, and immediately this image is figuralized as “flourishes” and “arabesque,” which then leads back to Mallarmé on the black and white of writing. First there is a statement that one does not write with light on or against the sky, presumably a rejection of an Idealist aesthetics such as Stevens’ idea of order as lights marking out the disorder or abyss of night and the sea. Instead Zukofsky asks if in the act of reading-writing one does not become the ink itself, and this relates directly to his *Bottom* thesis as well as to a favorite pun on eye/I—the tactile eyeing and engagement with the text, the act of reading that blurs the demarcation between reader and read (writer and written). One might argue that this gestures at or enacts a reading of Mallarmé away from the conventional Romantic-Symbolist versions to more recent views of Mallarmé as a poet of inscription—a poetic model more suitable to reading Zukofsky as well. This stanza is particularly oblique, although it is perfectly characteristic of Zukofsky and one can find many short poems in a similar mode where the essential difficulty is due to the flexible syntax so that the words point in multiple directions at once. Zukofsky’s interest here is in complicating the relation between black and white, ink and paper, reader and text, inside and outside, thought and body, self and world. He poses this in the form of a question that asks whether the reading eyes will not regret that they are not looking instead at the “outside” world, which is the same as regretting that the text is not the world. But of course the text is in the world, so Zukofsky is inclined to mix Mallarmé’s textualization of the world (black and white) with some green. So far (we have not yet come to the end of the question) the concern is with the problem of overcoming the division of mind and body in reading and writing. As I understand it, there should be no regret yet it haunts us, and we find it difficult to talk our way out of this division. This question continues or completes itself by bringing in others, that is, readers, so that the world out there is the text’s potential readers, and finally the question is whether or not they reciprocate.

These readers are referred to as the buying crowd—the latter term is obviously loaded in the Mallarméan world and the mention of buying, like the previous “loan,” reintroduces the business motif and the pressures these readers inexorably exert on the poet. “To buy” also has the sense of accepting—“I can buy that (argument).” The final emphasis of Zukofsky’s elaborate question appears to be simply that you can never know your reader’s “ear,” how they will reciprocate, and that is the ultimate *hasard*. So Zukofsky now returns to the pun on “Pascal” and “paschal,” but here the primary sense is related to the question of reciprocation: if we hear or read “Pascal,” do we hear or think “Pascal” or “paschal”? As already indicated, this particular pun is fortuitous for Zukofsky’s purpose since the words are etymologically related, even identical one might say. Yet at the same time they are not, and I take it that the point is that others will inevitably hear and read otherwise, and as we well know once such differences open up they proliferate madly. When Zukofsky begins this entire *Le Livre* segment by identifying his affinity with Mallarmé in terms of “hazard,” “chances stakes” and so on, he accumulates a whole series of contingencies, or senses of contingency, ending with the reader-audience, who are in fact the world for which the author performs. Although Mallarmé can certainly be understood as an exemplary case of the poet who deliberately constructs works that fend off all readers except those who can properly reciprocate or are willing to be instructed by the poem how to do so, the *Le Livre* project, especially in the conceptual form it has come down to us, takes elaborate account of the reader-audience so as to build into the “work” the necessity of infinitely various reciprocations. I assume that this is

Zukofsky's position as well—that these differences are not finally to be regretted but to be taken into account as a necessarily element of writing which then conveys a sense of mutual participation in infinite differences.

Immediately following another Pascal quotation, stating that the beginning of any text is decided last, is a second reference to contemporary events, in this case a play performed for the 20th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, which Zukofsky alludes to as "A" and therefore simultaneously implicates the poem at hand. The atomic bomb becomes the all too real possibility of Mallarmé's abyss that counters or shadows Zukofsky's *"A"*. A reference to "retched the / pinnacle," which encrypts "reached the pinnacle" and could also be heard as "wretched …," I assume points to the tip of the "A" and suggests a number of possibilities. Coming after Pascal's quotation, we have the question of whether we order history from its beginning (alpha) or its end (the present), whether that present's pinnacle is represented by the "A"-bomb or *"A"* the poem. The retching appears to refer back to the play performed on the anniversary of the first dropping of the Bomb, which presumably it condemned while commemorating its victims, or maybe should have, or maybe it was pointless that it did so—Zukofsky seems to have gone out of his way to be ambiguous here. The final comment in this stanza is that it is pitiful for the world to be lonely when it would like to love all, which seems to take us back to Leonov all alone in space and the loan from above for "all." Is the suggestion that all the human ingenuity and resources that go into sending men into space or creating and dropping the "A"-bomb seem to end up in expanding aloneness, dividing, destroying, alienating people from each other when their innate sense is love, the desire to be with others. How can we be a world except with others?

That thought leads directly into the final movement of this *Le Livre* segment by acknowledging Mallarmé's generosity which accepts that the book neither begins nor ends and the role of the "crowd" in the *Le Livre* project as "choir." The final word in this elliptical quotation is "vaults," which can be either a noun or a verb but in either case evokes the music theme. The vault is a synecdoche for a church (or any sacred structure), which in turn limns the heavens, implying the fullness of the sound when multiple voices and instruments perform in such a setting, the sound of transcendence (vaulted) as being with others. In a by now familiar abrupt alteration of direction or voice, Zukofsky approvingly quotes Mallarmé on a practical proposal to fund young artists by a small tax on works in the public domain, which Zukofsky would happily offer to his son and his friends as representative of a young generation and his heirs—a legacy of sorts. We should also note that this rather modest proposal contrasts sharply with the grandiose project of *Le Livre*, a typical Zukofskian gesture of cutting the exorbitant pretenses of poets down to size. Obviously this does not imply a lack of ambition, as by most standards Zukofsky's work is itself surely exorbitant, but it does suggest some humility about poetry's desires to change the world. So this long meditation with Mallarmé around the question of forecasting—the inheritance that foresaw the present and its projection onward toward the future—appropriately puts the poet/artist in their place and in scale.

I would not want to insist on more than a plausible possibility for the specific readings or reciprocations I offer here, but hopefully plausible enough to convince that Zukofsky is not merely being enigmatic. He is not a Mallarméan poet in the sense of being deliberately hermetic, offering an allegorical surface that simultaneously resists while calling for a decoding only available to certain sensibilities. Zukofsky's flexible syntax, punning surface and abrupt jumps certainly fend off paraphrasable reduction, but the possibilities of reading have a more egalitarian intention. At the point when he most explicitly avers from Mallarmé—when the latter would make a universe purely of language and Zukofsky insists he prefers to keep his feet closer to the ground—Zukofsky refers to Mallarmé as "a / last rare/ mind" and repeats this almost immediately after (423). Describing someone as "mind" is not

unambiguously flattering if we recall the argument of *Bottom*, in which error is due to excess of mind becoming detached from sensual contact in the world. The "rare" adds the suggestion of rarified, and a last mind is an isolate mind. Zukofsky describes this "last mind" as both "cornered" and dying. By cornered Zukofsky appears to suggest that Mallarmé's radical poetics are a reaction to the lack of viable political options for an ameliorated state of existence—a sense of crisis that drove him to extreme singularity. "Last man" suggests an option taken to its end, beyond any concern for others and therefore a kind of dying. Whether or not we accept this view of Mallarmé, it is a plausible enough consequence of the desire to purify the language and fold everything up into a Book—an aesthetics that tends to imply that the fully achieved work can exist only in the singular mind. While many readers might feel Zukofsky himself persisted in an extreme textualization of the poem, he always insisted on the body and the sensation of being in the world with others as fundamental to what he was doing. As the passage proceeds from this point, Zukofsky will modulate to those parts discussed above concerned with reciprocation and the crowd as participant in the fulfillment of the book. All of this, finally, is composed with rather than against Mallarmé.

We should quickly recall that the central *Le Livre* section is framed by the two segments of Greek philosophy. Pythagorean cosmology is an apt introduction to the grandiosity and ambition of Mallarméan aesthetics in full bloom as gestured toward by the *Le Livre* notes. As "beautiful" as this aesthetic apotheosis may be, it requires some medicinal skepticism to balance it out, and this in turn leads into the mixed concluding pages of the movement, which are predominately more mundane, even trivial. This framing also recalls the perennial debate between philosophy and poetry (or music), and the latter's resistance to or diffusion of the concept. Zukofsky's effort, as so often, is to bring the two into poetic debate. While this may ultimately privilege poetry over philosophy, it may be more useful to understand Zukofsky as groping back to an area where poetry, philosophy, music and science (the space race) are indistinguishable or arise from the same grounds. We might call this area "numbers" or measure, which takes us back to the impulse for harmony, for a dynamic situating of ourselves in the world that drives all symbolic action. In this sense, Mallarmé also seems particularly apt for Zukofsky's interest as a writer who it is difficult to decide whether it is his ideas or poems that come more to the fore and have left their mark, and indeed his elusive critical prose has some family resemblance to that of Zukofsky in, for example, *Bottom*. In opposition to many contemporaries, Zukofsky always insisted that science (which for the moment is equivalent to philosophy or abstract discourse) was in no sense antithetical to poetry, ultimately because what we are talking about is linguistic constructions that performatively attempt to negotiate our sense of being in the world with others.[19] His particular brand of skepticism is this recognition and therefore an insistence on bringing diverse discourses into interplay, turning them against each other and entwining them together.

Endings

After a series of fairly neatly marked off segments each predominately worked from a given source, the last four pages of "A"-19 appear to straggle off into familiar miscellaneousness, until the final two stanzas return to the setting of the prelude and recall both Mallarmé and the poet's son. As mentioned, one striking feature of these pages is the

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[19] His most direct discussion of the much debated relation between science and poetry is in "Poetry / *For My Son When He Can Read*" (1946)—the essay placed first in *Prepositions* (*Prep+* 3-11).

resurgence of contemporary news and anecdotes, which up to now have largely been kept out although lingering around the edges. Of course given the presence of Mallarmé, keeping the newspapers at bay is appropriate, but apparently this cannot be enforced indefinitely, and in fact these pages are far more typical of the texture of the later *"A"* generally. The mixed nature of the last pages might be understood as a modulation of the poem to the earthly present, which as we have seen has always been present or implied, even while the movement has mainly been preoccupied by the high flying of music, Mallarmé and number cosmology. Nonetheless, the relative cacophony of everyday life and language does seem finally to assert itself.

Taking a closer look at two passages in these last several pages, we want to note the interplay of our key motifs—say, aesthetic transcendence/earthly grounding, metaphysical order/skepticism, the new/inheritance—which are not to be understood as manichean debates but as interpenetrating and mutually defining. Zukofsky picks up what appears to be random detritus from his environment and puts them into relation, so that they figuratively enact the movement's concerns.

First there is a roughly three stanza passage starting with "Lunik" and ending with "ascend" (430-431). In order, there is mention of the spacecraft Lunik 9's landing on the moon in 1966 and sending back the first close-up photos of the surface, a sign that dogs are permitted only on a specific elevator, Dante threading a needle, Catullus with a spindle, a mishap that sent the Gemini 8 space capsule into a spin and one of the astronaut's subsequent remarks, an American's exclamation on seeing a statue of Apollo at the Vatican, a remark that someone's fever was soothed by tobacco and reading Shakespeare, and finally a possible key to all this in the final phrase, "burn to / ascend." Let me begin by taking Zukofsky's advice to begin anywhere ("A"-21.496) and noting the obvious connections between Dante's threading, Catullus' spindle and Gemini's spinning. The significance of images of spinning or weaving is obvious enough, especially in the neighborhood of two major poets of particular importance to Zukofsky, and he often equates weaving with fiddling (itself a forked pun). Equally obvious is the association with the Fates (the literal reference in Catullus if one cares to look it up) and the threads of life—which relates to the entire structure and intent of Dante's *Commedia*. Punning on spindle and spinning then leads to the Gemini capsule, which does look like a spindle—perhaps a comically frightful image of the astronauts literally in the grip of fate. In any case, this and the preceding mention of Lunik (Luna) relate back to the earlier mention of Leonov's spacewalk—that image of supreme transcendent isolation, which requires vast accumulations of social effort and expense as well as of cultural inheritance to achieve. All this of course ties in further with various references to the space race that thread through most of the longer movements of the 1960s beginning in "A"-13 (265) and going right up to mention of the first moon landing in "A"-22 (509.32-35, 510.4-5). As already indicated, Zukofsky saw the race to the moon as in part a manifestation of the dangers of abstraction, a knowledge directed to repressing and forgetting our earthly existence—its sensory basis, change, mortality—and thus lunatic. The photos Lunik 9 sends back tell us what we would have guessed: that the surface of the moon is desolate with nothing but porous rock. But equally Zukofsky was fascinated by the space race, and after all poets have a long and close association with the moon and the lunatic, of which this very passage might be symptomatic. Mallarmé is in many respects exemplary among poets tempted by the azure and the transcendent, yet whatever critique Zukofsky implies is strongly mixed with admiration for and identity with the French poet and his rigorous integrity. The key word in the astronaut's comment on his spinning experience is "God," as he apparently is responding to a question about whether he thought about God in this potentially lethal predicament. In this case, the astronaut's reply affirms that one does not in such straits think about transcendentals but about the more down to earth requirements of the matter at hand.

This “God” is the linking word with the seemingly irrelevant parenthetical addition that follows in which the painter Benjamin West translates or refigures a statue of Apollo that he sees in the Vatican into an American Mohawk, which we might see as an American translation from higher brow to lower brow images, or in any case to the more locally familiar. Perhaps there is an implied jab at the Americans naming their spacecraft and programs after classical gods rather than more immediately native possibilities. In any case, Apollo was of course the program that would finally land a man on the moon in a few years and already in February 1966, when Zukofsky began “A”-19, had sent up its first mission. Apollo is a sun god associated with music, poetry and medicine—poetry’s day-light rather than lunatic powers, which surely are given preference in Zukofsky’s work. Although the West referred to here is in Zukofsky’s source the American painter, the specific articulation of Zukofsky’s gist—“West of / Vatican…”—is suggestive. America is literally west of the Vatican as a representative cultural capital of the Old World as well as of a theology that tends to deny the value of existence in this world.[20] The west is also conventionally the direction of life moving toward death (where Apollo sets). A page or so later there appears (also parenthetically set off[21]) a couple of anecdotes concerning Cardinal Cushing, a prominent public figure at the time closely associated with the Kennedy family. In the second anecdote, Cushing tells the Pope that his spiritual “infallibility” does not extend to medical advice. Again we find the tension between transcendental and earthier concerns, with the suggestion that the former has its limits in alleviating physical hurt—an observation Dr. Sextus would applaud. This is counterbalanced by an analogous contrast between the Cardinal’s rough voice and Mozart’s *Requiem*, here being performed in remembrance of President Kennedy—so a transcendent music can sooth this kind of hurt better presumably than the Cardinal’s sermonizing. I am suggesting that there is a link between these two parenthetical passages in the recurrence of the Vatican, although it is a kind of sideways connection. More significant is how these seemingly trivial and off the cuff anecdotes tie into various strands threading through the movement in an unexpected way.

Returning to finish off our original passage, the American motif evidently leads to the next bit, which like the Benjamin West anecdote is taken from Francis Parkman and gives a very mundane example of the ills of physical existence being partially transcended both bodily (tobacco) and mentally (Shakespeare)—again the medicinal-aesthetic motif (Zukofsky was a life-long smoker and smoked a good deal of Shakespeare as well). What about the dogs and their elevator? The key I would suggest is in those final words, “burn to / ascend”—in this case comically, even absurdly suggested by pets going up. Perhaps an elevator ride is for dogs the equivalent of a space flight. We might even spot the old joke on dog spelled backwards. We end up with a whole series of examples of the burning desire (or fever) to ascend, to rise above mere existence, of which the aesthetic aspirations of poetry or music are presumably variations, although preferably as a proportional reconciliation of the azure and the earth rather than a mere escape from the latter. Here and elsewhere in Zukofsky’s work this desire is far more fundamental than the aesthetic impulse narrowly conceived as it encompasses what we would normally term science or history, such as in the instance of

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[20] There are a number of mostly sarcastic references to the Vatican scattered through the movements of the mid-1960s, during the period of Vatican II (1962-1965) when the Church instituted sweeping modernizing reforms. In “A”-15 there is mention of the declaration absolving Jews for the death of Christ (369); see also “A”-14.353.7-8 and “A”-18.398.20-21.

[21] In the printed text, these anecdotes appear in an unclosed parenthesis, but I am not aware that the open parenthesis, so favored by the projectivist poets, ever interested Zukofsky, nor is that type of sketching of thought processes characteristic of his constructions. I suspect there is a closing parenthesis missing from the text here.

space flight. A couple stanzas further on, there is an enigmatic passage mentioning old frame doors giving way to sliding doors, which then somehow segues into mention of computers and "Invisible Media" (433-434), which would appear to relate to this idea of technological development as a manifestation of this transcendent desire that in turn frees art from its "fetters," although presumably not from the underlying impulse to vault.

The reader can again decide how plausible these particular reciprocations are. The passage itself offers figures suggesting principles of order according to fate or mere happenstance. More specifically the relations that predominate in "A"-19 overall and among the miscellaneous bits of the last pages are those between forms of ascent counter-balanced by forms of being grounded, but we can see that these images or motifs may be no more than the particular manifestations of the dialectic inherent in the poetic language. The free mixing of tonal registers is perfectly typical of Zukofsky and among his most disconcerting habits, because we never feel sure how seriously or not to take the details the text offers—satire and absurdity, literary or aesthetic seriousness and the mundane, the trivial and the violences of contemporary history are all mixed together. For Zukofsky the underlying principle is that everything relates, which may be a matter of counterpoint or the relations may be tonal. The reading of such a passage, which in many respects can be taken as typical of *"A"* overall, requires a persistent readjustment, as well as an atuned and flexible ear. Such a reading, then, enacts a being in the world as a relating and recoding of figures: always interrelated and implying possible orders, yet without any assurance there is an underlying Order other than the very living in it as this perpetual act of negotiation.

All the later long movements of the 1960s ("A"-15, -18, -19, -21) end on anti-climatic and self-deflationary chords. "A"-19 opens with the poet on stage and urged to perform another encore, but near the end we return to the poet, described as an "old singer" and even a bit of a "schlemiel" (a rare appearance of a Yiddish term in *"A"*), sipping an Irish liquor brought back by Paul from his peregrinations. The poet reads the "blarney" written on the bottle claiming the liquor is an ancient recipe once jealously guarded by Irish warriors, but the heroic age is long gone, if it ever existed, and the poet drowsily produces his own bit of blarney by imagining a diver (himself or perhaps the bottle itself) walking under water from Ireland to America to deliver the liquor. After a good deal of high flying, we encounter this curious image of a diver strenuously walking "splayfoot" along the bottom of the ocean, which chimes with Zukofsky's favorite self-image of himself as a poet: a plodding work horse.[22] Ireland of course has strong associations with poetry as well as hard drinking—not necessarily discrete activities. All of this is amusingly and deliberately trivial, emphatically countering any pretense about poetry aspiring to Mallarméan purity. If the incorporation of the mundane, ordinary and even degraded into poetry is one of the hallmarks of modernism, Zukofsky develops this less as a matter of content than of figures, tones and counterpoint to create his hybrid music. This comical image of the diver/poet so down to earth as to tread the bottom of the ocean then flips outside to the falling snow, and so explicitly circles back to the prelude and the "present" of the poem. On the one hand, the poet anticipates snow ploughs, but then immediately the snow becomes "A legacy / windfall" of notes, as we have seen and heard performed in the course of this movement. This capitalized "A" in the middle of the stanza is irregular and so points us to the poem in hand. The phrase encapsulates much of

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[22] The image of the diver walking across the bottom of the ocean from Ireland to America was suggested to Zukofsky by a newspaper article that primarily reports an interview with Cardinal Cushing, which is also the source for the couple of Cushing anecdotes on the preceding page (432). Cushing mentions a story that when his father, who had immigrated from Ireland, saw a resurfacing diver in the Boston harbor, he remarked that if he had known it was possible he would have walked across the ocean rather than take a ship.

what we have been discussing: the cultural inheritance or loan or legacy from on high like snowflakes descends on us all and is to be seen or heard wherever we look or listen; blown about by the wind and thus a windfall, a matter of luck or chance as they fall together in an album (Mallarmé) or valentine (Zukofsky).[23]

The final image of Mallarmé is not that of the hat (the brainy Mallarmé) but of a glimpse of his face, an other that "might / make one." Mallarmé's face is of course his poetry, which we read and which offers "a covert look"—an apt characterization of Mallarmé's text and perhaps of Zukofsky's as well. The conceit of the text as face continues into the following phrase, set in italics to indicate it is a quotation, in fact from the first scene of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. The immediate antecedent of this phrase in this passage is "song" but could also be Mallarmé's "face," and in *Pericles* it is the beloved's face which is being extensively read.[24] In either case, song aspires to *erase* sorrow or, alternatively, is *raised* to or by song, and we have seen a good deal about such uplift and its hazards in the course of the movement. However, one can hardly say the sorrow is erased from the song that is "A"-19 any more than is the case with the hymn to God called, "Die Elenden sollen essen."

Finally we have the puzzling "nine / so soon twenty," which makes little sense until we read the following movement (already composed a few years before "A"-19), where we find these numbers refer to Paul at age 20 and 9. The numerical motif is picked up one final time but here set firmly in time with at least a touch of sorrow. Numbers are of course how Zukofsky chose to designate the movements of *"A"*, so one can just as easily read this as "A"-9 anticipating "A"-20, a sequential order that intertwines "fate" and "chance." The inexorable march of time, which results in legacies acquired and passed on, yet in the present of writing or reading there is nothing inexorable about these legacies at all.

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[23] "Album" alludes to Mallarmé's lyric, "Feuillet d'album" (Album Leaf), which evokes music and the reading of a beloved's face. Mallarmé's "album-leaf" reappears near the end of "A"-23 (560), although admittedly there the reference to Mallarmé is exceedingly obscure.

[24] This phrase is quoted in the *Pericles* chapter of *Bottom* where Zukofsky discusses syllables as musical notes, as in *St. Matthew Passion*, that rise and fall and move outward (*Bottom* 432). The subject of the phrase in *Pericles*, "Her face the book of Praises," literalizes the face as text metaphor and was incorporated into the title of one of Zukofsky's poems, "Her Face the Book of—Love Delights in—Praises" (*CSP* 205-207) composed in 1959. That poem concerns the topic of poetic legacy, specifically between Zukofsky and Robert Duncan. One has to be cautious about reading Zukofsky's quotations as allusions, however, and in this case Pericles' reading of the beloved's face turns out to be dangerously erroneous (at that point in the play, according to the *Bottom* argument, Pericles thinks too much to see or love correctly), although this does not appear to be an implication Zukofsky is interested either in "A"-19 or in the earlier poem.